PROSPECTUS

OF

THE INTENDED PUBLICATION

OF

OSSIAN'S POEMS

IN

THE ORIGINAL GAELIC;

WITH A

VERBAL TRANSLATION INTO LATIN

BY ROBERT MACFARLAN, A. M.

EXPLAINING THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAVE HITHERTO RETARDED THE PRINTING THEREOF.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY W. BULMER AND CO. CLEVELAND-ROW, ST. JAMES'S.

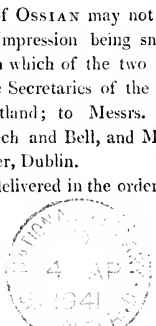
1804.

NOTICE.

ELEGANT AND INFERIOR EDITION OF OSSIAN.

THAT the Admirers of OSSIAN may not be disappointed of Copies (the present Impression being small), they are requested to signify with which of the two Editions they wish to be furnished, to the Secretaries of the Highland Societies of London and Scotland; to Messrs. Nicol, Pall-Mall, London; Messrs. Creech and Bell, and Mr. Bradfute, Edinburgh; and Mr. Archer, Dublin.

☞ Copies will be delivered in the order of Subscription.



PROSPECTUS, &c.

No doubt can be entertained, that in ages very remote from the present, a number of Poems, in the Gaelic or Celtic language, the native tongue of the inhabitants, were preserved in the mountainous districts of Scotland.* These Poems recorded the deeds of heroes, and other celebrated characters, in periods of great antiquity. They were recited or sung by a particular description of persons, called Bards,† and were handed down by memory, and oral tradition, from one generation to another. Indeed such a mode of preserving the first poetical productions of all countries, (and to it we are indebted for Homer himself,) was so general among the Celtic tribes, that it would have

* Besides those translated by Mr. Macpherson, the Rev. Dr. Smith, of Campbelton, and others, have collected a number of poems attributed to Ossian, and to other ancient bards.

† Vos quoque, qui fortes animas belloque peremptas,
Laudibus in longum vates diffunditis ævum
Plurima securi fudistis carmina Bardi. LUCAN.

Nobody doubts the existence of Irish and Welsh bards, and those of other Celtic tribes. Why then should the existence of those in Scotland be questioned?

been rather a surprising circumstance had the natives of Scotland been found an exception. The existence of such Poems, has been recorded by Buchanan,* and Boethius,† in their Histories of Scotland, written in the sixteenth century. A variety of other evidences also are to be found in ancient Scotch authors, Welsh Bards, and manuscripts of unquestioned authority, &c. which will be more fully detailed in the Report of the Highland Society of Scotland, and in the Dissertation by Mr. Macfarlan,‡ both which will soon be presented to the public.

The first person in modern times, whose attention seems to have been directed to these remnants of ancient literature, was *Jerome Stone*, who died in June 1756. He was a native of the county of Fife, where the Gaelic was perfectly unknown, but being appointed Rector of the

* Buchanan's words are very strong: "Carmina non inculta fundunt, quo rhapsodi proceribus aut vulgo audiendi cupido recitant, aut ad musicos organorum modos canunt." Hist. lib. ii. Folio Edit. p. 32. See also p. 14. Poems to which Buchanan applied the epithet of *non inculta*, must have had real merit.

† Boethius Hist. Scot. l. 7, ad finem, expressly mentions Fingal, under the name of *Fyn Mac Cool*, representing him as a great warrior of Scotch extraction.

‡ An Essay on the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems, and on the Origin of the Caledonians, or Highlanders, and of the Ancient Irish.

school of Dunkeld, a town situated at the entrance into the Highlands, and being a person of much industry and strong natural parts, he resolved to learn the language principally spoken by those among whom he was settled; and after having acquired the Gaelic, he was surprised to find that a variety of literary works were preserved in that language, which seemed to him to be possessed of great merit. He proceeded to collect some of them; but a premature death (in the 30th year of his age) put an end to those attempts, after he had made some progress.*

The late Mr. James Macpherson had superior advantages for carrying through such an undertaking. He was a native of the Highlands, and though, it is said, that he was not a perfect Gaelic scholar, yet he understood the language well, and spoke it fluently. He was also for some time schoolmaster in a parish

* Statistical Account of Scotland, Vol. V. p. 110. In the Scots Magazine printed An. 1756, (Vol. XVIII. p. 15,) consequently before Mr. Macpherson published any of his translations, Jerome Stone describes the Poems he found in the Highlands, as performances, "which for sublimity of language, nervousness of expression, and high spirited metaphors, are hardly to be equalled among the chief productions of the most cultivated nations; whilst others of them, breathe such tenderness and simplicity, as must be greatly affecting to every mind in the least tinctured with the softer passions of pity and humanity."

situated in a more remote part of the Highlands than Dunkeld, namely, at Ruthven in Badenoch. From his office, he necessarily had much communication with the middling and lower orders of society, by whom the Poems which existed in that part of the country, were treasured up in their memory, and frequently recited. The parish where he resided being in a central part of the Highlands, it is natural to suppose, that works handed down by tradition would be found both more numerous, and more genuine, than in a part of the country like Dunkeld, where there was a mixture of a different race, where other customs prevailed, and where a language of a very different nature was beginning to gain ground.

Mr. Macpherson having been led, (in 1758), to publish a translation of some specimens of Gaelic Poetry, which were received with much applause, a number of respectable characters about Edinburgh resolved to employ him in collecting those larger Poems which it was believed still existed in the Highlands; and in the course of the journeys which he took for that purpose, the epic Poems of Fingal and Temora, and others of lesser note, were discovered.*

* A Member of the Highland Society of London gives

As soon as these Poems were published, doubts were started regarding their authenticity. It was contended, that they were not composed by Ossian the son of Fingal, but were fabricated by Mr. Macpherson. Though such an idea cannot with justice be maintained, yet it must be acknowledged, that the conduct which Mr. Macpherson unfortunately pursued, in with-holding the information with which the Public might have been furnished, and delaying so much

the following account of certain circumstances which enabled Mr. Macpherson to procure so great a collection of Gaelic poetry.

When Mr. Macpherson was a tutor in the family of Mr. Graham, of Balgowan, he got acquainted with a neighbouring clergyman, Mr. Fraser, then minister of Regorton, but now settled at Moneidy, in the vicinity of Perth, whose grandfather and great grandfather were successively Deans of the Isles. Being much addicted to literary pursuits, they had made a variety of collections in different languages, but in particular of Gaelic literature. Great part of these collections were carried away by Dr. James Fraser, Register and Secretary to Chelsea College, during the reigns of Charles II. James II. William, Anne, and George I. who was nephew to the youngest Dean; but the Gaelic manuscripts remained in the possession of the Dean's eldest son, Mr. Thomas Fraser, minister of Bolleskin, in the county of Inverness.

When Mr. Macpherson took his northern tour, for the purpose of collecting the Gaelic poems which he afterwards translated and published, he was introduced by Mr. Fraser of Regorton to Mr. Fraser of Bolleskin, then in the eighty-seventh year of his age, and he prevailed upon him to deliver up these manuscript collections.

longer than was necessary, the publication of the original, tended to justify such suspicions.*

Mr. Macpherson died in February, 1796, after having prepared for the press, with the assistance of Mr. Morison, an excellent Gaelic scholar, now living, a copy of the Poems in the original Gaelic; and he also had procured a translation of a part of the Poem of Fingal into Latin by Mr. Macfarlan, a scholar perfectly skilled in both languages. Mr. Macpherson however still declined sending the original to the Press. During the latter part of his life, he had become (as is usually the case when age advances) less active than formerly; and it had become a subject of dispute whether the Poems should not be printed in the Grecian rather than the Roman character.† A specimen

* These suspicions were considerably encreased by the circumstances of Mr. Macpherson's being enabled to publish the originals without incurring much expence, in consequence of having a sum of 900l. and upwards remitted to him from India, in course of the year 1784, by Sir John Macgregor Murray, Bart. as the amount of a subscription made for the purpose by a few Gentlemen in that country. But the money being unaccounted for, it is now the subject matter of a lawsuit on the part of Sir John.

† Mr. Macpherson was led to think of the Greek character from finding it mentioned in Cæsar's Commentaries that the muster roll of the Helvetians, a Celtic tribe, was written in Greek. "In castris Helvetiorum tabulæ repertæ sunt litteris Græcis confectæ." Comm. De Bell. Gallic. lib. i. c. 29. He

in Greek was actually printed; and though that plan might certainly have been adopted, yet the difficulty of converting above ten thousand lines into the Greek character, joined to the circumstance, that in that state the work would be intelligible only to scholars, rendered the Roman character preferable.

Mr. Macpherson left John Mackenzie, Esq. of the Temple, his executor, together with a legacy of a thousand pounds to defray the expence of preparing for the press and publishing the original Poems. Mr. Mackenzie was an excellent scholar and a worthy man, but was so scrupulously anxious to execute the trust reposed in him, in such a manner as to do credit to so valuable a Work, that he was led to put off, from time to time, determining

also attempted to simplify the Gaelic orthography, and to have the original printed in that style; but after trial, that plan was found too arduous to be accomplished, and it was in consequence abandoned. In the present edition, the ancient Gaelic orthography is to be scrupulously adhered to, and the terms and idioms of the language will be exhibited in their ancient garb. The purity of this ancient language does not require any exotic refinements to give it additional energy, or to render it more intelligible. Dr. Smith has justly observed, "Perhaps there never was a language better adapted to Poetry "than the Gaelic, as almost all its words are energetical "and descriptive of the objects they represent, and are also "for the most part an echo to the sense."

on the plan to be adopted, respecting which various opinions were entertained.* At last, however, he made the necessary arrangements with Messrs. Nicol and Bulmer ; and a proof of the first sixteen pages was actually printed, and sent to him, immediately previous to his death.

Mr. Mackenzie left several executors to his will, of whom Mr. George Mackenzie, assistant surgeon to the 42d regiment of foot, or Royal Highlanders, alone administered. As the publication of such a Work was not consistent with his professional avocations, he resolved to put the Manuscripts into the hands of the Secretary

* Mr. Mackenzie had certainly many difficulties to struggle with in this undertaking. After such poems were collected as could be found in Mr. Macpherson's repositories, it was necessary to have the translation into Latin by Mr. Macfarlan completed, and the Gaelic orthography settled. For that purpose the Rev. Mr. Ross, of Edinburgh, was employed to transcribe the whole work over again, agreeably to the established orthography. Next, the character was to be determined upon; and it was thought advisable to have specimens printed in the Roman and Greek characters, as well as in the simplified orthography attempted by Mr. Macpherson, and circulated for the remarks of persons intelligent in Gaelic literature. It became also necessary to get a paper manufactured for the work, and to settle with a respectable printer and publisher. All these operations, which occupied a very considerable portion of the time which has elapsed since the Poems came into the possession of Mr. Mackenzie, were effected immediately preceding his death.

of the Highland Society of London, for the purpose of being published under the patronage of that Society; and at a general meeting held on the 17th day of May 1804, the following gentlemen were appointed a Committee to superintend the execution of the Work; namely, Sir John Sinclair, Bart. M. P.; Sir John Macpherson, Bart.; Sir John M'Gregor Murray, Bart.; John M'Arthur, Esq. of York Place, Portman Square; Alexander Fraser, Esq. of Lincolns-Inn, the Secretary; and Mr. Colin Macrae, of the Temple, the Deputy Secretary.

As soon as circumstances would admit of it, the Committee met to consider what measures could be pursued, for carrying on the publication with as much expedition as possible. They examined the Manuscripts, and found, that though some of the smaller Poems were wanting, yet that the principal ones were extant. They resolved, therefore, to print those which were in their possession, and to endeavour to recover such as were deficient by every means in their power. They next proceeded to arrange a plan with Messrs. Nicol and Bulmer for the printing and publication of the Work; and, having entered into an agreement with them for that purpose, they now trust,

that it will be completed in the course of the ensuing season. though the necessity they are under, of sending the proofs to be examined in Scotland, may occasion some delay.

The public, however, will at last be gratified with the appearance of a Work, the authenticity of which has long been the source of much controversy. But as a Dissertation on this important question may soon be expected from that respectable institution, the Highland Society of Scotland, who have been collecting materials for the purpose, and another by Mr. Macfarlan, the Latin translator of the Work, the Committee do not think it necessary to dwell on that point at this time. They have indeed little doubt, that the publication of the original, when it does appear, will satisfy every impartial reader, acquainted either with the Gaelic, or with the Latin language into which it is now translated, that the Gaelic is the only *possible original* (this every reader of taste will at once be able to ascertain by comparing the two translations together); and that the Latin translation by Mr. Macfarlan, which is a plain literal version in the manner of Clarke's Homer, has as just a claim to boast of originality, as the English one published by Mr. Macpherson.

It is necessary here to add, that in the opinion of many eminent Gaelic scholars, Mr. Macpherson's translation, though valuable in several respects, yet, in many instances does not do sufficient justice to the singular merit and beauties of the original. It is asserted by competent judges, that he has frequently departed from the original, sometimes misconceived its meaning, in others passed over passages altogether, and often unnecessarily introduced Scriptural and Oriental idioms, which he ought to have avoided, as being perfectly inconsistent with the beautiful simplicity of the original poems, and as furnishing an additional argument against their authenticity. On these grounds the Committee have resolved to print a translation into English, line for line with the original, in the same manner as the Latin. In this new translation, every endeavour will be made to give a just idea of the perfections of an ancient author, whose works, (notwithstanding the disadvantages under which he laboured), have seldom been equalled, and never have been surpassed by those of any other age or country; and which impartial foreigners, distinguished for their taste, their talents, and their learning, have justly ranked with the most celebrated

remains that antiquity has transmitted to us, as the summit of literary exertion.*

JOHN SINCLAIR,

CHAIRMAN.

London,
June 25, 1804.

* The beauties of these Poems are most happily illustrated by the celebrated Dr. Blair, in one of the most elegant and excellent works of Criticism ever published.

APPENDIX.

MR. MORISON, who is mentioned in p. 8, as having assisted Mr. Macpherson in preparing the original Gaelic for the press, being still living, though in a very advanced period of life, it was thought right, before the Prospectus was printed, to request his answers to the following queries regarding his concern in the publication intended by Mr. Macpherson.

Queries for Mr. Morison, of Greenock.

I. Are you the person mentioned in p. 8 of this Prospectus?

II. What do you recollect regarding your preparing a copy of Ossian, in the original Gaelic, for the press?

III. Did you see or copy any part of the work from old manuscripts?

IV. Have you any doubt of the authenticity of Ossian's Poems.

Mr. Morison's answer was as follows:

SIR, *Greenock*, 17 *July* 1804.

I HAD the honour of your card of the 15th, containing four queries adjected to a Prospectus of the intended publication of Ossian's Poems; and in reply to these,

I. I am the person mentioned in page 8 of that Prospectus.

II. I distinctly remember assisting the late Mr. Macpherson in preparing a copy of Ossian, in the original Gaelic, for printing. My knowledge of the original Gaelic I considered superior to Mr. Macpherson.

III. I did see, and collected a few, of these manuscripts, as well as traditionary tales, both of which I considered as perfectly authentic, and as such I delivered to Mr. Macpherson.

IV. I do now declare, what I have from my youth up firmly published, that I as firmly believe in the authenticity of Ossian's Poems, as in the existence of soul and body.

At my advanced period of life, (now 86,) and by the providence of God enjoying an uncommon degree of health and memory, I flatter myself you will be persuaded, that I would not deliberately make such averments, were they not perfectly consistent with the conviction of my own mind. Before concluding permit me to repeat the Gaelic alphabet.

Ailm,	Goibh,	Ogh,
Beth,	Huāth,	Bhog,
Coull,	Jogh,	Ricus,
Duir,	Luish,	Suil,
Eagh,	Muin,	Tin,
Scarn,	Nuin,	Ūir.

And wishing you every success in all your undertakings, hitherto calculated for the welfare of your country,

I have the honour to be, with great respect,

SIR,

Your most obedient and

Very humble servant,

ALAISTER MUIRENICH.*

To Sir John Sinclair, Bart.

&c. &c.

* Which is Mr. Morison's name in Gaelic.

Printed by W. Bulmer and Co. Cleveland-row.